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Subject: WUNC: NC Regulators Approve Major Permit For Atlantic Coast Pipeline

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The state Department of Environmental Quality has issued a major permit two energy companies need to build the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

DEQ Secretary Michael Regan announced Friday the approval of what is called a 401 water quality certification, which brings Duke Energy and Dominion Power one step closer to breaking ground on the project.

The companies plan to build the natural gas pipeline from West Virginia through Virginia and into North Carolina along the I-95 corridor.

The permit was approved after eight months of deliberation, during which time the public was allowed to submit comments, Regan said.

"Our efforts have resulted in a carefully crafted permit that includes increased environmental protections, while giving us the tools we need to continue close oversight of this project as it moves forward," he said in a statement.

Regan said the permit requires the companies to test and monitor water quality near the route during and after it is complete.

But environmental groups quickly criticized the process, saying regulators ignored opposition from residents who live along I-95.

"Not only will many landowners and residents close to the pipeline have adverse impacts to their health, land use, safety and quality of life, but it will be mostly people of color and low income who will be impacted," said Hope Taylor, of the group Clean Water for North Carolina.

On the same day, Gov. Roy Cooper announced the creation of a \$57.8 million fund for environmental mitigation initiatives. A press release from the governor's office said the money comes from the companies that operate the pipeline, and can be used to help communities along the proposed route to have better access to affordable natural gas.

"My goal for North Carolina is complete reliance on renewable energy, which builds a cleaner environment and a stronger economy," Cooper said in the statement. "During the time it takes to get us to a full renewable energy future, we will still need to rely on other fuels as we move away from the pollution of coal-fired power plants."

Supporters say the project would be an economic boost to eastern North Carolina, where rural communities would benefit from connections to a major pipeline.

Roanoke Rapids Mayor Emery Doughtie told WUNC in August the Atlantic Coast Pipeline could help his economically struggling area.

"We obviously need to do anything that we can to try to attract good new industry to these surrounding counties and I think natural gas would be a relatively safe, stable and cost-efficient way to do that," Doughtie said.

Duke Energy and Dominion Energy still need an air quality permit, three stormwater permits, and approval of an erosion and sediment control plan before the pipeline can operate in North Carolina, according to DEQ.

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